

The Museum at the corner of art and technology

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By Charlotte Prong Parkhill, For the Chronicle

When TheMuseum opened eight years ago in its former incarnation as a children's museum, its motto was "Art and technology at play."

Today, the new exhibit is a group show that explores the relationship between art and technology.

"That's kind of cool. We've come full circle in eight years," said David Marskell, CEO of the downtown museum.

RAM: Rethinking Art and Machine opened last week and runs until January.

Marskell admits that explaining the exhibit to those that haven't seen it is difficult.

"This show, from a branding point of view, is a tough one. It's not Warhol, it's not Jane Goodall, it's not the Titanic," he said, mentioning past exhibits at the downtown museum.

"You have to explain it, and words don't do it justice. You've got to see it."

Photos don't do the exhibit justice either, since many of the pieces, from seven internationally recognized artists, are interactive.

There's the Canadian premiere of David Rokeby's Dark Matter, a sound sculpture that is activated by the visitor, currently installed in the underground gallery.

There's the mesmerizing gallery of pieces by Daniel Rozin — a hall of mirrors created where art and technology meet.

It includes Trash Mirror No. 3. Made of 500 pieces of garbage scavenged from Manhattan streets, the massive work subtly reflects the viewer.

Artist Jim Campbell filmed birds flying up from a fountain in India, then sequenced the images through thousands of LED lights in Exploding View.

There are even early works from digital pioneer Manfred Mohr.

“Mohr was the first to show computer-generated art in Paris in the 1970s and caused a huge debate in the art world,” Marskell said.

“Was it art, if it was generated by a computer? And there are people today who are really pushing the boundaries.”

The show was put together by Toronto curator Marla Wasser, who also worked with Marskell on the 2009 show *Andy Warhol's Factory*.

“Marla got a taste of the community and a sense of the importance of technology here at that time,” Marskell said.

“This show has brought us to a level of, ‘Holy cow, look what’s in this community.’ This show could be in Manhattan or Paris.”

Laura Blereau came to Kitchener from New York City for RAM’s opening. She’s a director at Bitforms Gallery and represents three of the artists — Rozin, Mohr and Peter Vogel.

She was surprised at the calibre of the exhibit, given the size of the community.

“What Marla did really exceeded all my expectations and has positioned each of these artists in a new light in a way that rivals what we do at the gallery.

“This is because the space is so generous here at TheMuseum and each artist has enough room for their art work to really breathe together in the same space,” she said.

“(It) is a great example of a community that is probably hungry for new media art. You don’t get to see it frequently.”